

Summarized Interview with Chrystal Gaskins

**Conducted by Nia King and Solenne Montgomery on March 21, 2021
for the West Springfield High School Applied History Program**

Mrs. Chrystal Gaskins, 48, was interviewed by Nia King and Solenne Montgomery on Monday March 21, 2021.

Chrystal was born in Fairfax County at Fairfax Hospital on March 28, 1972. Chrystal was raised in a local farming community that was surrounded with many family members. She remembers a couple of elementary schools surrounding the community and little to no traffic within the community. Growing up, her household consisted of her mother, grandmother, and herself and the property she lived on was jointly-owned by family members. Her mother, Juanita Virginia Gaskins, was a Virginia native born in Washington, D.C. on August 29th, 1942. Her father, Morris Allen King, was a white man from West Virginia born in 1945. Chrystal said her mother was “born in the wrong era.” She explained that her mother was born in the wrong era because she was a “free spirit.” Chrystal explained that because her mother was a dark skin black woman she suffered from racism and colorism, affecting her relationship with her own family and Chrystal's father's family. Chrystal said that colorism played a huge role in how black women were treated at the time, and that interracial relationships between black women and white men were seen as taboo. Chrystal also mentioned how her mother was depressed and suffered from alcoholism, she even recalled how her mother used to send her to the ABC store to get alcohol for her. When she was young, she did not know much about her dad's side of the family. It wasn't until she developed her interest in genealogy research when she was older that she found out her dad's family history and all about her half siblings. She has five confirmed half

siblings on her father's side of the family; four brothers and one sister as well as two aunts, and two uncles but she only has a relationship with her half-sister.

Chrystal and her mother lived in Reston, VA for a few years. In Reston she went to Dogwood Elementary for kindergarten. Here she described that she did not remember attending classes; she just remembers wandering around the school until a teacher would come and lead her back to class. After Reston, she, her mother, and her grandmother moved to Centreville and there she attended Centreville Elementary from the first grade through the sixth grade.

On April 13th 1982, her mother passed away from liver problems and about a year later, March 27th, 1983, her grandmother passed as well. Now left with no immediate family, at 11 years old Chrystal was picked up by family members who didn't want Chrystal, and who Chrystal didn't want to be with. She recalls the household being extremely abusive. The negative feelings that her extended family had towards her mother were projected onto Chrystal as well. Chrystal said she wasn't treated the same as the biological children. They made her do much of the housework as punishment, such as clean the chicken coop and collect eggs, cut and stack wood, clean bathroom pots, in addition to other forms of abuse. She also recalls harboring some hatred towards God because although she was religious, she was angry and upset at Him for taking away her mother and grandmother. Eventually she was able to leave, however she still bounced between houses a lot. Between the ages of eleven and thirteen, Chrystal moved frequently but ended up staying with her step-grandmother, whom she liked, and who was also her cousin. Chrystal explained that back then, it was a common occurrence for black families in rural areas to end up marrying distant cousins. She said that due to how rural black communities were more isolated at the time and lacked the transportation to travel across the county efficiently, many families simply urged their family members to marry family friends, who

sometimes ended up actually being distant cousins. Sometimes they even urged them to marry distant cousins on the mother's side since, in a biblical sense, they would've been regarded as 'less related' since lineage is paternal in the Bible.

At 13 years-old Chrystal ran away and became a ward of Fairfax County, and during this time she stayed at houses of friends who she knew from Centreville High School. At 15 years old she was placed in a juvenile detention center but then relocated to Harbour House, a group home in Annandale. Chrystal attended Chantilly High School initially. She remembers in high school a lot of fights because girls from different schools wanted to jump each other. She believes the fights were provoked by race; but recalls school officials covering it up as just plain school rivalry. After turning 17 years old, she was sent to the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center because advisors saw that she was talented with her hands. One major event Chrystal remembers that impacted her life was when she went to automotive school. She remembers the school had not taught a woman because no woman had ever taken the automotives course. Here she remembers fighting to get the chance to be taught the course. This was so important to her because school officials said as a woman she could not pass and graduate in automotives. She remembers impressing her teachers and peers with her skill and speed when putting parts and pieces of cars back together at a fast pace. One vivid memory she remembers is when a couple of guys attending the school had an issue with a car. She remembers telling them the issue with the car was the starter. The men denied the issue was the starter but replaced it and the car worked. At the Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center, she made history and became the first black and female mechanic to graduate. She graduated from Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center but received her diploma through Chantilly High School.

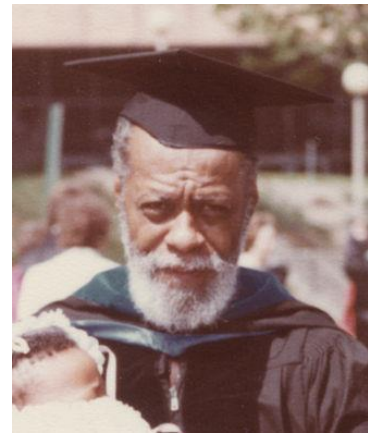
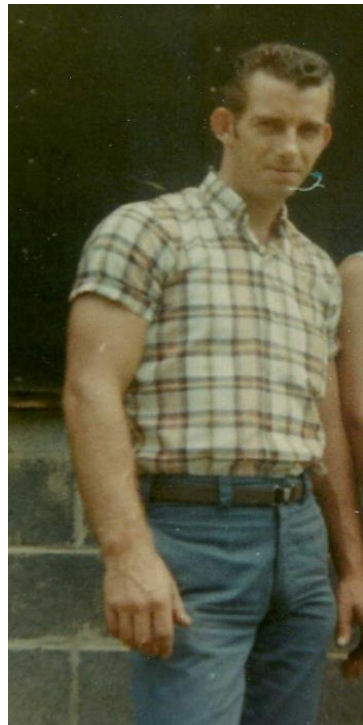
After high school, she was sent back to the group home but didn't want to be forced to stay till she was 21. Instead, she decided to go to D.C and from D.C took a bus to Portsmouth, VA. In Portsmouth, she worked various jobs, such as at Hardies and Pizza Hut as delivery driver, rented a house, and even bought a car. However, eventually she did decide to come back to the Centreville-Manassas area. She stayed with her godmother, and her godmother helped her get a job, which she admitted to loving, working for a widow named George, taking care of his kids and his horses.

Chrystal decided to go back to school and thus she started college at Northern Virginia Community College in 1991. At this time, she was also pregnant with her daughter. She told us she spent a lot of her pregnancy at the Eleanor Kennedy Shelter, however, she said the environment and people weren't the best. She said that things were often stolen from her, so she knew she had to get out of there. Her daughter was born September 14th, 1991, and by this time she was out of the shelter. She had been working at Giant throughout college but quit in December 1992. In 1993, she graduated from Northern Virginia Community College. Also in 1993, her daughter went to stay with Chrystal's cousin because she was working three jobs: one at a nightclub, one as a mechanic, and one at Trak Auto parts. On July 28th, 2000, she got married. Throughout the 2000s, Chrystal had a variety of jobs. Chrystal recalls having had property in Centerville but her extended family was renting it out and she didn't want to deal with the legal battle. Eventually, she decided to sell the property because the house was condemned. However, in 2005 she bought her first house in Hurt, VA. In 2017, she bought the current house she resides in on her husband's family estate in Spotsylvania, VA. She started working at Avis Budget Group in January 2012, and two months later began working at Hertz.

In January 2019 , she left Avis Budget. She continues to work at Hertz, where she now works with her husband.

One family history fact she recently found out was that her cousin Dr. Edward W. Crosby was a founder of Black History Month. She explained “finding this information out at family reunion really hit home for her” because her family had a part in founding a month that is now integral to Black History and is celebrated yearly.

When asked what advice she would give her children and grandchildren, Chrystal said that she would want to tell her kids don’t give up just because people tell you to give up because things may not be as bad as they seem and that if you ever need help just ask, but don’t expect people to do it all after you ask. For her grandchildren, she wants to remind them to, at the end of the day, prioritize needs over wants.



Top row - left to right: *Juanita Virginia Gaskins, young Juanita, Lurie Scott (grandmother)*

Bottom row- left to right: *Morris Allen King, young Morris, Edward Crosby*

Bibliography:

"Edward W. Crosby." Wikipedia. April 14, 2021. Accessed May 07, 2021.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_W._Crosby.

Family Pictures Provided by Chrystal Gaskins